6.3 The Guild

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6.3.1 Background

One of the discussions brought up during the scenario exercise dealt with the question of broadening the interest and participation in computer games. Media companies, researchers and designers all seem to agree that computer games hold an enormous potential in the future. Certainly, new technologies have to be put in place in order for this potential to be realized. But there is also another angle to this: computer games tend to remain a pretty well defined genre, with a huge and committed audience, but also with large parts of the population not particularly interested in them.

In terms of the Future Worlds defined in the scenario phase, the Guild did not use one of the developed worlds but envisioned a future world with the following characteristics from several of the worlds: *Strong self expression*, *Everyone producing*, *Extrovert* and *Short-term relationships*.

6.3.2 The Guild Object

The Guild concept took its starting point in the notion of "Guild Object", as explored in one of the previous exercises during the workshop. The Guild Object is a physical token worn by players. The Guild object helps players to recognize each other as friends or foes, and it enables players to bring the game with them out into everyday situations or environments. The Guild object could range from a piece of jewellery to a body implant, with some computational part, like a RFID tag. However, in the discussions around the Guild concept we came to realise that a "plain" non-computational artefact could fulfil many of the uses of a Guild object.

6.3.3 Play Communities

In continuation of the discussions about target groups for computer games, we started by discussing motivational factors in play and gaming – with a focus on those factors that are external to the game itself, such as need for excitement or relaxation, identity and social

networking. We spent quite some time listing various examples of "play communities" i.e. social groupings around a shared repertoire of play activities. How do they work? Why do people participate? The list of organizations had functions ranging from social clubs, such as Odd Fellow and other free masons type organizations, to golf clubs, role playing organisations, religious sects and societies, such as the Moon Sect or the Church of Scientology, or organisations like Hells Angels and al'Qaida (the latter being not exactly "play communities", but still interesting for the comparison).

In our informal brainstorm around these play communities some characteristics were recurrent:

- One of the main activities in a play community is to manage how new members get introduced and gradually become integrated in it. Secrets and the process of revealing them is important as a part of the process of initiations.
- The progression of getting to know the community, as well as rising in rank within the community, is an important motivational factor in participating.
- Shared stories, and even more, shared secrets are important in keeping the play community together. Secrets can be of many shapes: a sect member may be prohibited to communicate the revelations of the sect to a non-member, members of clubs for extra rich or talented people are advised not to display their talents/riches in public, communities engaged in practices that are taboo or illegal stick together around knowledge that would hurt both members and association if it was made known to outsiders.
- Members of a play community form friendships and structures for mutual support that go beyond the realm of the play activity itself

We also listed media and events these communities use in order to keep the organization running and progressing: Uniforms or various costumes, which often signify rank and status within the organization, parties and other social gatherings, initiation rituals for petitioners, secret handshakes or identities, symbols and tattoos to mark affiliation, address books or web sites giving members access to other members' personal contacts, various facilities such as club houses, systems for favours granted by fellow members.

6.3.4 Game idea

When thinking up our game, we wanted to exploit the very strong forces that are at play when people join and maintain memberships in these kinds of various organizations and networks. We also wanted to explore the notion of ubiquitous gaming, and create a game that is played by engaging with physical spaces and objects, using the everyday settings of the players as a part of the game experience.

The backbone in the Guild game is a narrative framework and a social structure that proposes a number of events and interactions to the players. We imagine heterogeneous uses for technological devices in the game – but these can be determined locally.

We explored a game idea along the following lines:

- a narrative backbone structure that proposes a series of events and interactions to the players
- a network of "guilds" where new guilds can be added to the game
- a LARP (live action role-playing game) where the players' everyday environments and actions take on a second meaning within the game context.
- Use of portable devices and new technology in the game – (whether it will be a part of the structure or a part of the content is to be determined)

- Two overriding themes: competition between enemy guilds – management of new members within each guild.

6.3.4.1 The narrative framework

The following narrative framework for the Guild game highlights interesting issues but is not a detailed story, rather a set of logical devices in order to make if not believable so at least acceptable – in the terms of fiction – the assumptions of the game. Two rivalling alien species land on earth, both with the mission to conquer humanity and take possession of its planetary resources, and to do so before the rivalling clan. Both clans strive to create a new society extending their own, and built on their own values as adopted by their human followers.

Figure 8: A new member being abducted by one of the guilds.

They begin their quest by abducting members of the human race. The abducted humans are modified as to their physical and mental essences, and they start to work for the final takeover of power. However, waiting for the new society, the abducted humans continue to live their everyday life as usual, and the signs that a person has been taken over by the aliens are subtle. Only an initiated person can read them.

For the new abductee, a second life in parallel to their everyday life starts up. The first event is the abduction itself. Later, the new abductee gets initiated in the rituals and routines of the alien clan. When the abductee becomes sufficiently knowledgeable, he or she may be sent out on operations aiming to prevent the other clan from taking power, or to abduct new humans. The "promise" to the abductee is that they will rise in rank and position when the new leaders take over the world. You begin as a low rank citizen, and work your way through missions to gain higher positions. This rise is also expressed in the artefacts, clothes and symbols worn by the abducted persons.

6.3.4.2 User scenario

The following user scenario describes the concept not from the fictional framework but the realm of players of the game.

Figure 9: An example of a guilds graphical tag.

An interested person - Sheila - gets to hear about the Guild Game and wants to join it. Through friend, websites, or other information channels she decides which Guild to join. Sheila likes the graphical profile of the NKMRR guild, and she knows slightly some of the members – they are people she would like to hang out with. She contacts the Guild in question, and an "abduction" is arranged for by the Guild. The abduction is seemingly a power overtake. In real terms, it can be described as a welcome party. At the Abduction, Sheila buys a token for the NKMRR Guild: a ring with an ID-tag containing her Guild Identity. It serves both to log in to the Guild website and to show her affiliation to other Guild players.

After the abduction, Sheila attends to NKMRR events once in a while. The club evenings are often mostly a social event, and an occasion to use the NKMRR costume – starting with the ring Sheila has gradually constructed/bought/collected a full costume for her NKMRR alter ego "Aliehs". Some of it can be worn under regular street clothing without calling on the attention of non-players.

At her work, Sheila starts to notice some of her colleagues wearing Guild tokens. Some work colleagues also show interest in the game, and she later on introduces them to the Guild, after which they are "abducted" as well. After a year, Sheila is responsible for arranging new abductions, which puts her into contact with a lot of new people.

6.3.5 Design Issues

The Guild concept was formulated in strong enjoyment. There are many issues in the concept that are not resolved – but this is also a consequence of the intention to focus at motivational factors outside external to the game itself. This division was of course difficult to maintain, and at some point we were all enjoying inventing new characters and fantastic guilds – really doing the work we had envisioned the players to do themselves.

There are some problematic issues in our concept that we believe are relevant for the genre of ubiquitous gaming overall, and that we would like to describe in order to open up for a discussion around them.

One issue is the idea of "giving up one's free will". On one hand this is a very useful device in order to have players enter the game, and to help them forget about everyday obligations for a while. On the other hand, the idea of obeying a guild gives unpleasant resonance to totalitarian system or religious sects.

Another central idea in the notion of ubiquitous gaming is that it should be possible – and interesting – to play a game at the same time as doing some other activity. Ubiquitous technologies open possibilities to layer fictional landscapes on top of real places. But do we have the necessary intellectual and emotional capabilities to handle parallel lives/worlds? Does presence in one context (real or fictional) require absence in other context? Can a split mind enjoy a full experience?

In the workshop discussion there was a general agreement about identity building as an important driving force in play and gaming. But there is an interesting issue in the role of fiction in relation to identity. How far can "play" identity building be pushed without spilling over into a persons "real" identity? Are we ready to confront the real consequences of fictional identity building?

To summarize the different design issues:
- In designing a game there is a need to define and address the social strategies/motivational factors of the "real" players of the game, in addition to that of the characters in the game.
- Ubiquitous gaming, i.e. game play not identifiable by a specific location or by a timeframe raises issues about how to distinguish play from reality.

Any person's choice of games (and of leisure activities at large) as a highly significant action in defining oneself and one's social context